

Representative Fleischman and Senator Slossberg,

My apologies for leaving the Education Committee before my turn came up to testify in support of Raised Bill 6834 and Governor's Bill 6837. On behalf of the ACLUCT, I had submitted written testimony outlining the irrefutable reasons to give these bills favorable action and the history of our support for this type of legislation, and I appreciate the committee's consideration of this written testimony.

I write with urgency today, on the last day of my five year tenure as legal director here, to share with your committee my experience visiting high schools around the state during my time with the ACLUCT that I had hoped to give you in person. My visits have been for purposes of giving presentations on Constitution Day or Martin Luther King Day, for some examples, and also to provide the students with know-your-rights information. Stamford, Fairfield, Hartford, Norwich, New Britain and New Haven are among the cities that I have visited. During these visits, I have always given students the opportunity to ask any questions about their civil rights and liberties, in writing or on-the-spot, and the disparity in these sessions between predominantly white suburban schools and the urban schools with larger numbers of students of color has been stark.

The differences begin to be apparent when I enter the schools. Fairfield, for example, had no police cars around the outside of the school and no visible uniformed police officers. This is similar to the situation in East Lyme, where I dropped my daughter at school nearly every day before she learned to drive. By contrast, to enter the schools in Hartford or New Britain, I had to navigate a gauntlet of police cars and officers simply to enter the building and arrive at the auditorium or classroom where I was presenting.

The students' questions also were starkly disparate. At the predominately white schools with no obvious police presence, the students' questions were about their First Amendment rights to speak about controversial topics, and it was a great privilege to engage with them about this important but non-criminal topic. In New Britain or in Hartford, the lists of questions I received were consistently about the students' Fourth or Fifth amendment rights: Can the police arrest me at school for violating the cell-phone use policy? I swore and was arrested for disturbing the peace – is that legal? Can I be suspended and arrested for wearing my pants too low? This latter group of students, from my perspective, were bright and engaging but did not have the luxury of discussing the First Amendment because they were telling me that they were in fear of or had been arrested for violations of school policy.

As a parent and as a visitor to these schools, I know – and I suspect that you do as well – that the reason the children at the predominantly white schools are not asking about arrests is *not* because the white students do not violate the cell phone policy or the dress codes or any other school rules; it is because they are not in fear of being arrested for such typical adolescent behavior.

We all recognize that school safety is important, but that important goal cannot justify the unequal treatment to students of color around the state when it comes to school-based arrests. I am sending this email because I want to share with you the bright and intelligent and engaged voices of the many students I have met around the state and on their behalf to urge you to not

only act favorably as a committee on a bill mandating a memorandum of understanding whenever police are assigned to school, a graduated response model to school discipline and reporting and analysis requirements, but to work to ensure that these requirements become law.

Often choosing to do the right thing comes at great cost, but these bills are low- or no- cost solutions to begin to eliminate the disparity in school based arrests and I urge this committee to do the right thing.

Respectfully,

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